

Decision Memorandum on Action and for Application of:  
Categorical Exclusion 1.12

Acoma Wildland Urban Interface Project

US. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Ely Field Office  
Lincoln County, Nevada

**Purpose and Need/Proposed Action for the Action**

The purpose/goal of the project is to reduce the risk of wildfire to the private property and improvements at Acoma by reducing the tree density of pinyon/juniper and brush density within a 500 foot buffer on approximately 130 acres along the west side of the property. Since Acoma is located adjacent to an area of high fuel loading, which is similar to the loading associated with large fires it is vulnerable to wildfire. During wildfire season weather factors consist of high temperatures, low humidity, and gusty winds generally out of the southwest. The private property at Acoma is situated where these factors would result in a fire that could damage the private property at Acoma. Implementation of this project would reduce the threat of wildfire to Acoma.

The proposed action would take place on approximately 130 acres within a 500 foot buffer of the public land/private property line, along the north and west side of the private property (Map 1). Tree density would be reduced to approximately 20-25 trees per acre. This would result in a tree being left approximately every 45 to 50 feet. Trees left would consist of the larger mature trees greater than 12 inches in diameter at root collar. The smaller saplings and immature trees would be targeted for removal. Manual (chainsaw) and/or mechanical methods (bull hog, feller buncher, or similar piece of equipment that masticates trees) could be used to reduce the tree density. If chainsaws were used all or a portion of the felled trees would be consolidated into piles and removed later through prescribed burning. Some slash consisting mainly of smaller branches would be left to degrade naturally. Removal of slash/biomass created when mechanical methods are used would depend on the type of mechanical equipment used. If a masticating type of equipment is used the residue created would be left on site to degrade naturally. If equipment is used that cuts the trees whole, all or a portion of the trees could be piled and disposed of through prescribed burning or usable tree portions would be hauled off site for biomass utilization while unusable portions would be left to degrade naturally or later burned. Possible offsite biomass utilization could include firewood, mulch, and/or chips. If slash piles are created they would be removed as soon as possible through the use of prescribed fire. This would reduce the likelihood of the piles becoming infested with insects. The burning would likely occur when there is snow on the ground or after a precipitation event to prevent extreme soil heating.

Mowing of brush would occur in areas with low tree densities and higher brush densities. Brush would be mowed in a mosaic pattern within the 500 foot buffer area. Mowing

would occur with a mower towed behind a tractor or other similar piece of equipment.

Pre-treatment inventory data would be collected prior to implementing treatments to compare with post-treatment conditions. The area would also be monitored the first and third growing season following treatments to determine if objectives have been met. Inventory and monitoring data would be collected using BLM approved methods.

Areas identified as having limited seed banks as a result of low understory species density, or areas with high cheatgrass would be seeded using certified weed-free seed. These areas would be identified after collecting pre-treatment inventory data. If mechanical equipment is used that results in skidding of trees these areas will be reseeded and scarified and/or covered up through back dragging. Seed would be applied using an all terrain vehicle (ATV).

Treatments identified above could be implemented in future years as maintenance treatments to maintain original project objectives.

### **Plan Conformance**

The proposed projects are not specifically identified in the Caliente Management Framework Plan, but are consistent with the following objective:

1. Forestry Objective 3 – To protect and manage all forest resources (rare or common) and to prevent their elimination from the ecosystem.
2. Recreation Objective 1 – Protect important botanic, zoologic, geologic, and paleontologic values to assure they are not lost, destroyed, or substantially altered.
3. Recreation Objective 6 - Provide for the maximum safety of the visitor, for the protection of personal property, and for the quality of the natural environment through development of a sound fire management and suppression program.

The proposed action was designed in conformance with all bureau standards and incorporates appropriate guidelines for specific required and desired conditions relevant to project activities (mechanical and prescribed fire). The project is in conformance with the Healthy Forest Initiative.

### **Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act**

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516DM 2, Appendix 1, 1.12. The projects are less than 1,000 acres for mechanical and 4,500 acres for prescribed burning. The project is also within a WUI area. The application of this categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effect which may significantly affect the environment. As shown in

the checklist of the categorical exclusion document, none of the exceptions as listed in 516 DM Chapter 2, Appendix 2 apply to this project.

I considered project size (less than 1,000 acres for mechanical and 4,500 acres for prescribed burning), location of the project (within Wildland Urban Interface), proposed method of implementation, vegetation condition and setting, standard operating procedures, and mitigation measures outlined in the proposed action to determine there are no potential significant effects from implementation of this project.

### **Persons or Agencies Consulted**

Letters describing the project objectives and intent to complete this project were mailed to individuals and groups who have expressed interest in participating in hazardous fuels reduction projects as well as state and federal wildlife agencies. A public notice was also placed in the Lincoln County Record concerning the project and was presented at the Tribal Coordination meeting on November 17, 2006. The project design and objectives were also sent to the science community (Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition Science Committee) for review and comment.

During the scoping period, comments were received from a property owner at Acoma inquiring if we were also cutting the brush or just the P/J trees. He expressed concern with the amount of brush in some of the areas. Two inquiries requesting general information about the project and how it would be implemented were received. Comments received from the Western Watersheds Project were inquiring about current vegetation conditions, requests for more information, project costs, links to other actions, and the meaning of certain terms. All comments received have been incorporated as appropriate into the development of the proposed action.

On February 15, 2006, the preliminary categorical exclusion document for the proposed project was sent to adjacent landowners, groups and individuals who have expressed interest in projects of this nature. The Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Indian Reservation were the only group who responded during the review and comment period, which ended on March 10, 2006. The Tribe stated they had no objections to the proposed action.

### **Decision and Rationale for Action**

I have decided to implement the Acoma WUI project without modifications. I have reviewed the plan conformance statement and have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved Caliente Management Framework Plan and that no further environmental analysis is required.

**Implementation Date**

This project will be implemented on or after April 25, 2006.

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Gene Kolkman  
Field Manager,  
Ely Field Office  
Bureau of Land Management

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Date

**Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

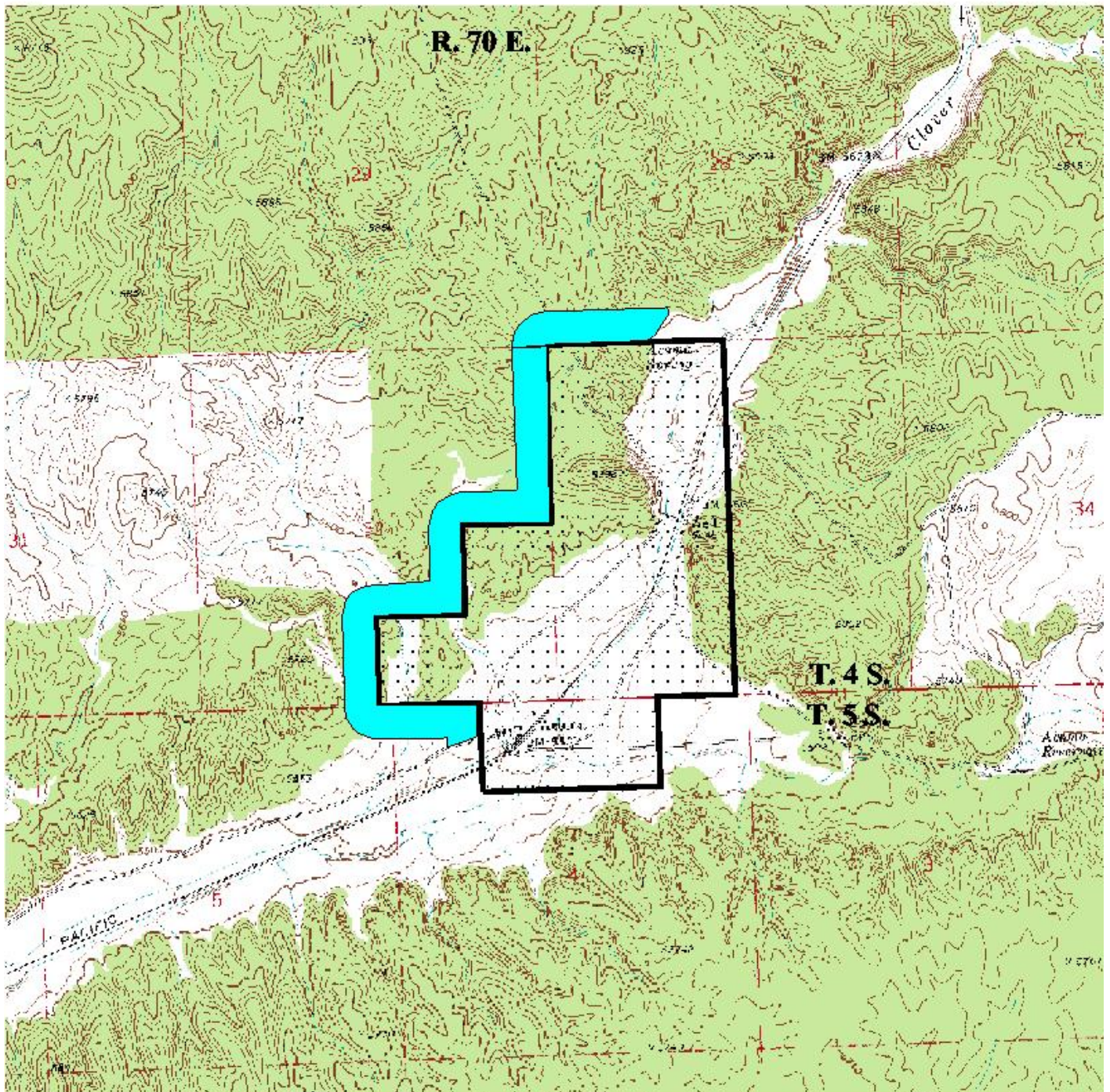
Within 30 days of receipt of this decision, parties who are adversely affected and believe it is incorrect have the right to appeal to the Department of the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 4.4. If an appeal is taken, follow procedures outlined in the attached form "Information on taking appeals to the Board of Land Appeals." An appeal should be in writing and specify the reasons, clearly and concisely, as to why the decision is in error. Please also supply this office with a copy of the Statement of Reasons. Also within 30 days of receipt of this decision, appellants have a right to file a petition for stay (suspension) of the decision together with an appeal, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.21. The petition must be served upon the same parties identified in items 2, 3, and 4 of form "Information on taking appeals to the Board of Land Appeals." The appellant has the burden of proof to demonstrate that the stay should be granted.

**Contact**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Kyle Teel, Fire Ecologist, at the Caliente Field Station, P.O. Box 237, Caliente, NV 89008; Telephone (775) 726-8117.



# Map 1: Acoma Wildland Urban Interface Project



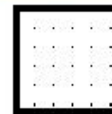
Acoma Quad

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Ely Field Office  
6/21/05



Private Property Buffer



Private Property





**ELY DISTRICT  
CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION (CX) REVIEW  
AND APPROVAL**

Team Leader Kyle Teel Date February 2, 2006

Name of Proposed Action Acoma Wildland Urban Interface Project

CX Number: CX-NV-040-06-08 Project or Serial Number: JD56

**CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REFERENCE**

516 Departmental Manual 1.12—Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing not to exceed 1,000 acres. Such activities shall be limited to areas (1) in wildland-urban interface and (2) Condition Classes 2 or 3 in Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III, outside of the wildland-urban interface; Shall be identified through a collaborative framework as described in “A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment 10-year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan;” Shall be conducted consistent with agency and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans; Shall not be conducted in wilderness areas or impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation as wilderness; Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure; and may include the sale of vegetative materials if the primary purpose of the activity is hazardous fuels reduction.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

The proposed action is to conduct fuels reduction through the use of mechanical and/or prescribed fire methods on approximately 130 acres of public land within the wildland-urban interface (WUI) of Acoma. The proposed project area lies approximately 18 miles east of Caliente at the small community of Acoma (Map 1). The purpose/goal of the project is to reduce the risk of wildfire to private property and improvements at Acoma.

Acoma consists of 520 acres of private land and approximately 6 permanent structures. The Acoma private property is bordered on the south by the Beaver Dam Road and the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR). The UPRR splits the property as it turns north away from the Beaver Dam Road. The improvements on the private property are located on the west side of the UPRR. These features (Beaver Dam Road and UPRR) create a fuel break and have reduced the risk of wildfire affecting the property along the south, and east boundaries. For this reason, the proposed project is only on the west and north side of the property.

The project would take place on approximately 130 acres within a 500 foot buffer of the public land/private property line, along the north and west side of the private property

(Map 2). Tree density would be reduced to approximately 20-25 trees per acre. This would result in a tree being left approximately every 45 to 50 feet. Trees left would consist of the larger mature trees greater than 12 inches in diameter at root collar. The smaller saplings and immature trees would be targeted for removal. Manual (chainsaw) and/or mechanical methods (bull hog, feller buncher, or similar piece of equipment that masticates trees) could be used to reduce the tree density. If chainsaws were used all or a portion of the felled trees would be consolidated into piles and removed later through prescribed burning. Some slash consisting mainly of smaller branches would be left to degrade naturally. Removal of slash/biomass created when mechanical methods are used would depend on the type of mechanical equipment used. If a masticating type of equipment is used the residue created would be left on site to degrade naturally. If equipment is used that cuts the trees whole, all or a portion of the trees could be piled and disposed of through prescribed burning or usable tree portions would be hauled off site for biomass utilization while unusable portions would be left to degrade naturally or later burned. Possible offsite biomass utilization could include firewood, mulch, and/or chips. If slash piles are created they would be removed as soon as possible through the use of prescribed fire. This would reduce the likelihood of the piles becoming infested with insects. The burning would likely occur when there is snow on the ground or after a precipitation event to prevent extreme soil heating.

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Treatments identified above could be implemented in future years as maintenance treatments to maintain original project objectives.

The project resource objectives are:

#### Short Term (Immediately Post Treatment)

1. Reduce pinyon and juniper tree density to 20 - 25 trees per acre within a 500 foot buffer along the western private property/public land boundary at Acoma.

2. Reduce shrub density by 75 percent within a 500 foot buffer along the western private property/public land boundary at Acoma.

#### Long Term (Five to Ten Years Post Treatment)

1. Reduce the risk of wild fire to the private property and improvements at Acoma.
2. Improve understory composition of perennial species within a 500 foot buffer along the western private property/public land boundary at Acoma.
3. Obtain FRCC 1 within the project area.

#### The following Standard Operating Procedures are Common to all Projects

For projects that involve the use of prescribed fire, a burn plan would be prepared and a smoke permit would be acquired from the State of Nevada prior to burning.

All treatment actions would comply with the *Ely District Policy Management Actions for the Conservation of Migratory Birds* (Instruction Memorandum NV-040-2001-02).

A cultural survey of the treatment area would be conducted and appropriate site documentation would be completed prior to project implementation. National Register eligible cultural resources would be avoided or impacts would be mitigated as necessary before treatments are implemented.

No permanent new roads or trails would be created. Some off-road travel could occur to facilitate operations. Off-road travel would be limited to that necessary to safely and practically achieve resource objectives.

The Ely District Noxious Weed Prevention Schedule and Policy would be adhered to during project treatments. Recommendations contained in the Weed Risk Assessment for the project would be followed.

Equipment would not be allowed to operate when the ground is unsuitable (i.e. excessively muddy or when saturated with moisture) or in terrain too steep to minimize ground impacts.

#### **CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

Letters describing the project objectives and intent to complete this project were mailed to individuals and groups who have expressed interest in participating in hazardous fuels reduction projects as well as state and federal wildlife agencies. A public notice was also placed in the Lincoln County Record concerning the project and was presented at the Tribal Coordination meeting on November 17, 2006. The project design and objectives were also sent to the science community (Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition Science Committee) for review and comment.



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The specialists listed in Table 2 below were involved in reviewing the proposed action for impacts and the screening questions (listed below) for Categorical Exclusions.

**Table 2.** Specialist involved in reviewing the proposed action for exceptions to National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusions

<b>NAME</b>	<b>RESOURCE ASSIGNED</b>
Ryan Pitts	Invasive, Non-Native Species, Noxious Weeds
Jared Bybee	Wild Horses & Burros
Kurt Braun	Archeology/Historic/Paleontological
Steve Leslie	Wilderness Values, VRM
Paul Podborny	Air Quality, Water Quality, Floodplains
Bill Smith	Riparian/Wetlands, Wildlife, Migratory Birds, Special Status Animal & Plants
Matt Wilkin	Wastes, Hazardous and Solid
Elvis Wall	Native American Religious Concerns
Carolyn Sherve-Bybee	Environmental Coordinator, Environmental Justice

### SCREENING FOR EXCEPTIONS TO CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS

The following exceptions apply to actions being considered as categorically excluded. Environmental documents must be prepared if any of these exceptions apply. Place an "X" in appropriate box. Would the proposed action:	Yes	No
1. Have significant adverse effects on public health or safety?		X
2. Have adverse effects on such unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources, park, recreation or refuge lands, wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, sole or principal drinking water aquifers, prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, or ecologically significant or critical areas, including those listed on the Department's National Register of Natural Landmarks?		X
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects?		X
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?		X
5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?		X
6. Be directly related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?		X
7. Have adverse effects on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places?		X
8. Have adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated Critical Habitat for these species?		X
9. Require compliance with Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management), Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), or the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act?		X
10. Threaten to violate a Federal, State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment?		X

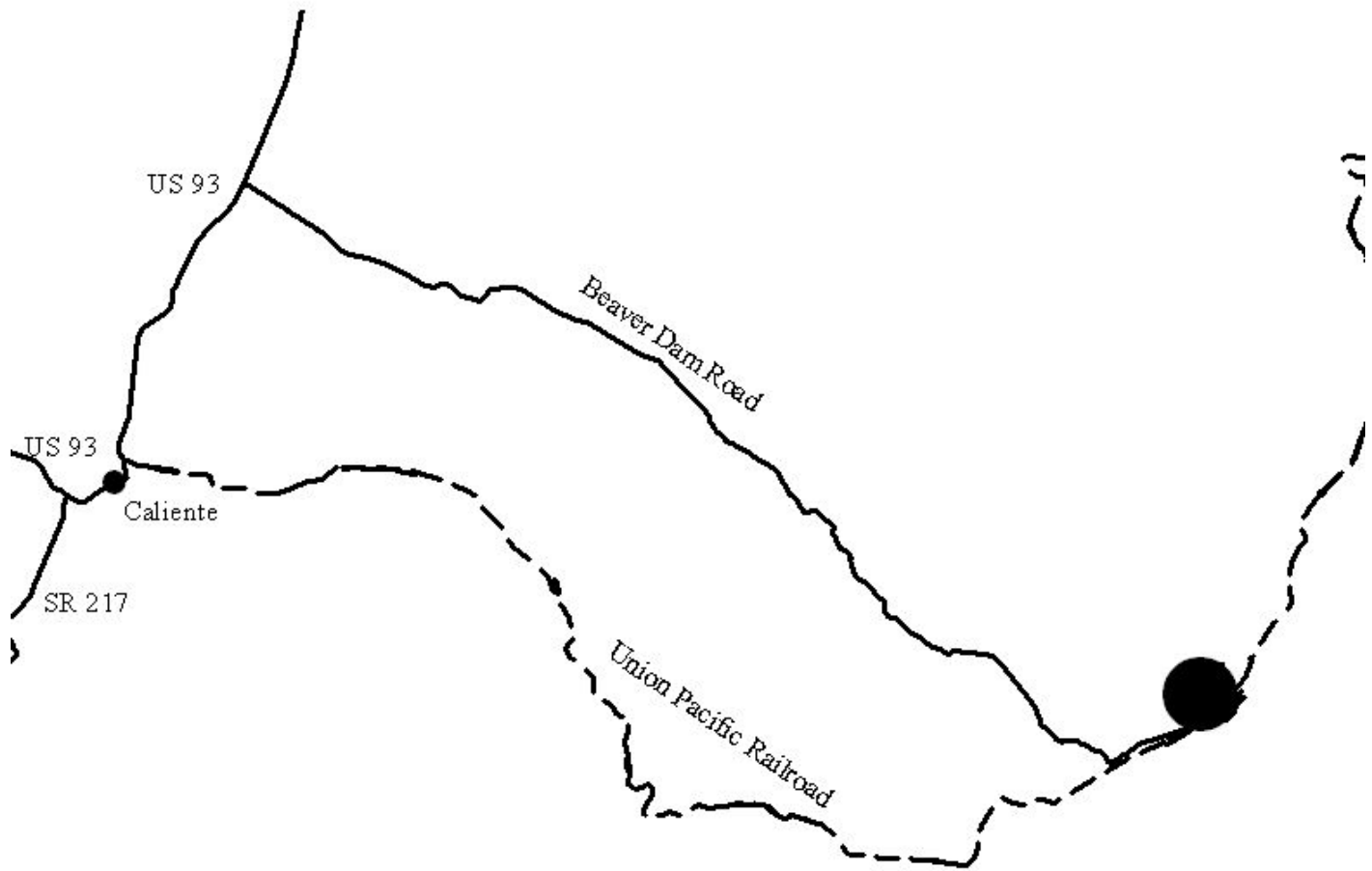
### FINDINGS

Based on review of the proposal and the ten exceptions listed above, this action qualifies as a categorical exclusion and an environmental analysis is not required. The proposed action is in conformance with current BLM Land Use Plans.

Approving Official: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Raymond W. Maestes  
Fire Management Officer

# Map 1: Acoma WUI Project General Location

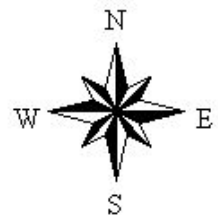


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Ely Field Office  
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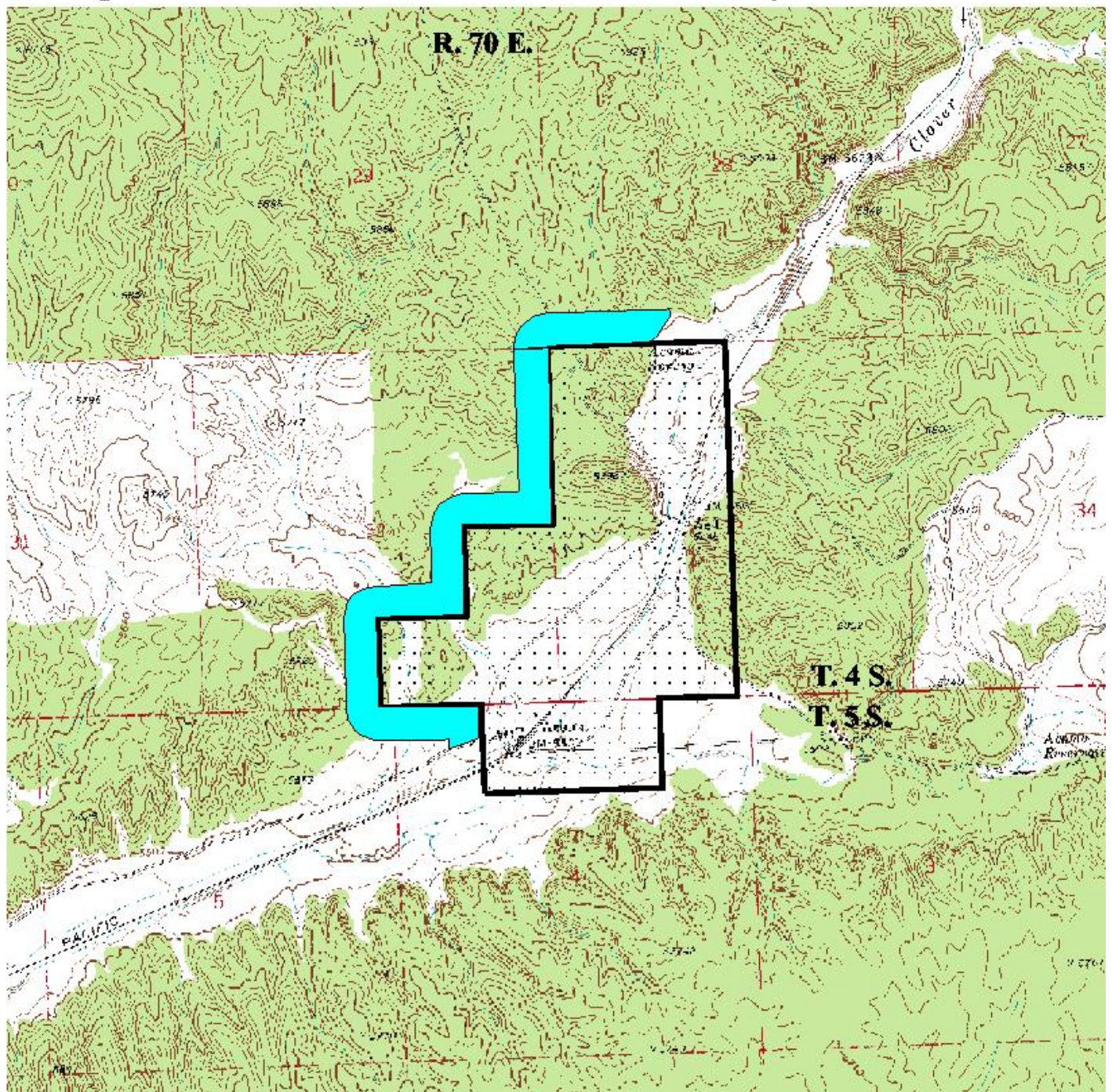
● Acoma WUI Project



1 0 1 2 Miles



## Map 2: Acoma Wildland Urban Interface Project



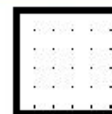
Acoma Quad

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6/21/05



Private Property Buffer



Private Property



0.5 0 0.5 Miles